



Confessions of a Feminist Porn Watcher

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Concern with pornography has increasingly been a major concern of feminist thought, a concern which has recently come to a focus around the documentary *Not a Love Story* by Bonnie Klein, produced for the National Film Board of Canada and widely distributed in North America. The film deals extensively with the type of pornographic imagery that depicts sadistic and violent acts against women, and it has stirred outrage at such imagery among both female and male viewers.

However, in the wake of the film, feminists writers have begun to discuss certain difficult issues which are "structurally absent," to use the film-theory concept, from *Not a Love Story*. As B. Ruby Rich noted in the *Village Voice* (see quote below), the antipornography campaign, like the pornography it attacks, has had the effect of depersonalizing sexuality and discouraging the development of a "multitude of sexual discourses . . . that people can turn to for sexual excitement instead of porn." Now Lesley Stern, in the British film-theory journal *Screen* (Nov.-Dec. 1982), has carried out a lengthy, thorough-going political analysis of the role of the anti-pornography campaign within the feminist movement; she dis-

cerns a paradoxical kind of capture of the issue by the anti-woman Right, and concludes that the tenor of the campaign has precluded analysis of what erotic pleasure in film viewing might be for female viewers. Stern's argument is far too complex to paraphrase here (*Screen* is available in many libraries and at \$7.00 per copy from 29 Old Compton St., London W1V 5PL, England). But a critical element of it deals with the necessity for a distinction between sex and violence which is not always drawn in anti-pornography writing. Like Rich, Stern would like to see some concrete analysis, from both men and women, of how screen pornography and erotica actually operate.

To analyze the functions of pornography does not, obviously, mean to endorse it. But its massive presence in contemporary society badly needs to be understood. In the following article, Scott MacDonald makes a highly personal, painfully candid beginning at this task. No doubt the article may prove shocking to some readers, as writing it was difficult for MacDonald. We welcome comments from readers, especially those wishing to carry onward responsible and objective discussion of an exceedingly emotion-laden issue.

—E.C.

SCOTT MacDONALD

Confessions of a Feminist Porn Watcher

Finally, here's a proper subject for the legions of feminist men: let them undertake the analysis that can tell us why men like porn (not, piously, why this or that exceptional man does not), why stroke books work, how oedipal formations feed the drive, and how any of it can be changed. Would that the film [*Not a Love Story*] had included any information from average customers, instead of stressing always the exceptional figure (Linda Lee herself, Suze Randall, etc.). And the antiporn campaigners might begin to formulate what routes

could be more effective than marching outside a porn emporium.

—B. Ruby Rich, "Anti-Porn: Soft Issue, Hard World," *Village Voice*, July 20, 1982.

Pepe Le Pew was everything I wanted to be romantically. Not only was he quite sure of himself but it never occurred to him that anything was wrong with him. I always felt that there must be great

areas of me that were repugnant to girls, and Pepe was quite the opposite of that.

—Chuck Jones, “Chuck Jones Interviewed,”
by Joe Adamson, *The American Animated Cartoon*, ed. Danny and Gerald Peary (New York: Dutton, 1980), 130.

For a long time I’ve been ambivalent about pornography. Off and on since early adolescence I’ve visited porn shops and theaters, grateful—albeit a little sheepishly—for their existence; and like many men, I would guess, I’ve often felt protective of pornography, at least in the more standard varieties.¹ (I know nothing at all about the child porn trade which, judging from news articles, is flourishing: I’ve never seen a child in an arcade film or videotape or in a film in a porn moviehouse; and though I’ve heard that many porn films involve women being tortured, I don’t remember ever coming in contact with such material, except in Bonnie Klein’s *Not a Love Story*, a film polemic/documentary on the nature and impact of porn films.) On the other hand, I’ve long felt and, in a small way, been supportive of the struggle for equality and self-determination for women; as a result, the consistent concern of feminist women about the exploitation and brutalization of the female in pornography has gnawed at my conscience. The frequent contempt of intelligent people for those who “need” pornographic materials has always functioned to keep me quiet about my real feelings, but a screening of *Not a Love Story* and a series of recent responses to it—most notably the B. Ruby Rich review quoted above—have emboldened me to assess my attitudes.

As I watched *Not a Love Story*, the film’s fundamental assumption seemed very familiar: pornography is a reflection of a male-dominated culture in which women’s bodies are exploited for the purpose of providing pleasure to males by dramatizing sexual fantasies which themselves imply a reconfirmation of male dominance. And while one part of my mind accepted this seemingly self-evident assumption, at a deeper level I felt resistant. The pornographic films and videotapes I’ve seen at theaters and in arcades *are* full of narratives in which women not only do what men want and allow men to do what they want, but effusively claim to love this particular

sexual balance of power. Yet, given that males dominate in the culture, why would they pay to see sexual fantasies of male domination? Wouldn’t one expect fantasy material to reveal the opposite of the status quo? Further, if going to porn films or arcades were emblematic of male power, one might expect that the experience would be characterized by an easy confidence reflective of macho security.

For me, however—and, I’m guessing, for many men who have visited porn arcades or film houses—these periodic visits are always minor traumas. While there is an erotic excitement involved in the decision to attend and in the experience itself, this is mixed with considerable amounts of fear and embarrassment. From the instant my car is carrying me toward pornography, I feel painfully visible, as if everyone who sees me knows from my expression, my body language, whatever, precisely where I’m going. The walk from the car to the door—and later, from the door to the car—is especially difficult: will someone drive by and see me? This fear of being seen has, in my case at least (as far as I can tell) less to do with guilt than with a fear of being misunderstood. Even though the frequency of my experiences with pornography has nothing at all to do with the success of my sex life—I’m at least as likely to visit a porn arcade when I’m sexually active as when I’m lonely and horny)—I always feel the power of the social stigma against such experiences. Unless the people who see me have been in my situation, I’m sure they’ll deduce that my visit to the arcade reflects my inadequacy or some inadequacy in the person I’m living with, that either I “can’t get any” or I’m not satisfied with what I can get. As a result, I try to look at ease during the walk to the door: any evident discomfiture on my part, I warn myself, will only fuel whatever laughter my presence has provoked.

Once inside an arcade or a theater, this anxiety about being seen continues, though with a different slant: will I run smack into someone I know? Of course, anyone I would run into would be unlikely to misunderstand the meaning of my presence; but such a meeting would interfere with what seems to me the most fundamental dimension of going to a porn arcade or moviehouse: the desire for privacy and anonymity. Meeting someone I know would, I assume (this has never hap-

pened to me), force us to join together in the phony macho pose of pretending that our interest in the pornographic materials around us is largely a matter of detached humor, that we've come for a few laughs.

The concern for privacy determines the nature of the interaction of the men (I've seen women at porn theaters, but never in porn arcades) involved with porn. Of course, theaters are constructed so as to impede the interactions of members of the audience (I always feel a pressure not to look at people on my way out), but the structure of arcades makes some interaction between strangers almost inevitable. In retrospect, the nature and apparent meaning of this interaction always seems rather poignant. Because of our shared embarrassment about being in this place together and, perhaps, because of our awareness that our presence is a sign of an erotic impatience our casual stances belie—for whatever reason, the men I've seen in porn arcades seem to allow themselves a detached gentleness with each other. For my part—and, judging from my limited observation, I'd guess my experience is pretty standard—I move in an unthreatening way; I am careful not to make eye contact with anyone. When eye contact is unavoidable, I put my mind on erase. When I walk out of a porn arcade, I take with me no functional memory at all of the particular faces I saw there, though each visit has confirmed my feeling that in general the faces are those of quiet middle-class men pretty much like me.

I've always assumed that, essentially, those of us who co-exist with each other for a few minutes in porn theaters or arcades share the embarrassing awareness that we're there for the same thing: to look for awhile at forbidden sexual imagery which excites us and, finally, to masturbate. In my experience, the masturbation itself seems less important as an experience than as a way of releasing the excitement created by the imagery. Even though most men seem to look rigorously frontward in porn theaters and even though porn arcade booths are designed so as to provide enough security for masturbation, the idea of being seen masturbating has always seemed so frightening to me (and, I assume, to others: I've never seen or heard anyone masturbate in an arcade) that I've never felt

free to get deeply involved in the act the way I can when I have real privacy. Usually at a porn arcade I keep myself from masturbating for ten or twenty minutes, until I'm ready to leave; the act itself rarely takes more than fifteen or thirty seconds, and as soon as it's over, I'm on my way to my car. I move quickly because, often, despite my confidence that the other men I see have much the same experience I do, I leave terrified that someone will enter the booth I've just left, see the semen on the floor—impossible in the dimly lit booths—and yell after me. I've never masturbated in a theater (though on rare occasions I've seen others do so), but only later, outside the theater, in the privacy of a car or a men's room.

Since the reason for braving the kinesic complexity of the porn environment is exposure to the pornographic materials themselves, it's important to consider what these materials really are. Over the years I've developed what I hope is a generally accurate sense of the motifs that dominate standard porn fare directed at heterosexual men; and I've thought a good deal about why these particular motifs seem so pervasive. I'm speaking of "motifs" here rather than of "films" because the films seem centered (both in terms of the time allocated to specific imagery and in terms of the viewing gaze) on specific configurations, "acts." Even though there's always a skeletal narrative, this is so obviously a function of the need to create a context for the motifs, that one doesn't need to pay particular attention to it—except insofar as it raises the adrenalin by slightly withholding the awaited imagery.² The empty nature of the porn narratives is confirmed by the booths, which, in my experience, have all presented Super-8 films in loops, usually two or three films to a loop. Since each quarter, or whatever the fee is, buys only 30 seconds or so of film (then the film stops until another quarter is deposited), one doesn't automatically see a film from start to finish. The motif structure is also reconfirmed by the announcements on booth doors of the particular acts which are featured in particular booths.³

For me the obvious amateurishness of the production values, the acting, and the writing has generally added to the titillating mood, since what the characters do to and with each

other is all the more outrageous *because* it's so patently done for the camera. In fact, some acts appear so uncomfortable and pleasureless for the actors that the camera's presence seems the only possible explanation. Our consciousness of the films as films is maintained by the camera angles, the length of shots, the lighting, all of which are usually (or at least this is how I remember them) overtly functional, providing a clear view of the sex acts between the actors and between their close-up genitals. In most films "aesthetics" are rigorously avoided in service of clarity.⁴

The motifs themselves have generally involved a relatively limited number of sexual interactions. Sexual intercourse in a variety of poses is nearly inevitable, of course, but it's rarely the clincher in a film. Judging from my limited experience, blow jobs (especially ending in ejaculation into the woman's mouth or on her face) and anal intercourse seem the present-day favorites. Sometimes they involve more than a pair of partners (two men have intercourse—one vaginally, one anally—with one woman; two women provide a blow job to one man; a woman gives a blow job to one man while another has intercourse with her) and/or a mixture of ethnic backgrounds. While the women involved seem to mirror conventional notions of attractiveness, the men are frequently quite average-looking: nearly any man will do, apparently, so long as he has a large erection.

No doubt the psychology of wanting to view sexual performances on a movie screen is complex, but over the years I've been aware of two general functions of the experience: one of these involves its "educational" value, the other its value as psychic release. When I was younger, my interest was in seeing just what the female body looked like and how it moved. Sexuality, as I experienced it as an adolescent, was something that usually occurred in the dark, in enclosed spaces, and under the pressure of time. Often I was more engrossed in the issue of "how far I was going to be able to go" than with really seeing and understanding what I was doing. In those days (the fifties) there were no porn films or arcades, but newsstands were beginning to stock *Playboy*, *Nugget*, and a variety of other girly magazines; and my hunger to see women's bodies—and to be able to examine them without the embar-

rassment of being observed by the women—resulted in periodic thefts of magazines. These thefts were serious extralegal transgressions to me; I was terrified of being caught, arrested and made an example of, until I developed the courage to try buying magazines from drugstore owners. These early magazines seemed a godsend to me, and they provided the stimulation for countless hours of masturbation. But they were also carefully censored: the focus was on breasts, though there were frequent side views of demurely posed buttocks; and all vestiges of pubic hair were, for some strange reason, erased from the photographs. (I didn't realize this until I was 17 and had the shock of my life during a heavy petting session.) One can certainly imagine a culture, like that of the Polynesians, in which the bodies of members of the opposite sex would not be visual mysteries, where we could be at ease with seeing each other. But though that has never been the case here, men continue to grow up under considerable pressure to know "how to handle" women sexually: we're supposed to know what's where and how it works. Looking at girly magazines may seem (and be) a callous manipulation of female bodies, but its function was never callous for me. I was powerfully drawn to women, but my complete ignorance of them frightened me; the magazines were like a nightlight: they allowed me to know a little more than I otherwise would have and they allowed me the fantasy (I always knew it was an illusion) that I'd "know what to do" the next time I got to see and touch a flesh and blood woman.

The functioning of pornographic imagery as a means of allowing men to examine the bodies of the opposite sex seems an important aspect of porn films and videotapes, which are full of extreme close-ups of cocks thrusting into cunts. The ludicrous lack of romance in such imagery is often mentioned in condemnations of pornography, but the function seems more scientific than romantic, more like Muybridge's motion studies than a Hollywood love story. And it seems to me that the value of this visual option continues to be defensible, at least in a limited sense, given this society's pervasive marketing of rigidly defined standards of attractiveness. For one thing, direct sexual experience with a conventionally attractive woman is, or seems, out

of the question for many men; and yet it's come to be one of the definers of a life worth living. Pornography provides a compromise by making visual knowledge of such an experience a possibility. Secondly, many men feel supportive enough of women to take them seriously when they complain about the invasion of privacy implicit in the unprovoked leers and comments they continue to endure on the street. I'll go to considerable lengths to avoid intruding in this way, but I have to fight the urge to stare all the time. Some of the popularity of pornography even among men who consider themselves feminists may be a function of its capacity to provide a form of unintrusive leering.

I've become conscious of a second aspect of this first function of pornographic materials, the "educational" function, during the past few years. Feminists have made us aware of the politics of staring at women, but the culture at large—particularly the culture as evident in the commercial sphere—tells us constantly that looking at women is what men are supposed to do. Looking at other men continues to be another matter entirely. Of course, spectator sports, and other forms of physical performance, allow for almost unlimited examination of how bodies function, but knowledge of the naked male body continues to be a tricky matter for heterosexual men. In conventional American life men are probably naked together more often than women: in shower rooms, most obviously. And yet, as is true in porn arcades, the kinetics of the interaction between men in such places are very precisely controlled. Men certainly don't feel free to look at other men; our lives are full of stories about how one guy catches another looking at him and punches him out. Never mind that I've never witnessed such an incident: a taboo is at stake, and potential embarrassment, if not danger, seems to hover on the edge of it. This situation is complicated further by the fact that even if men felt free to look carefully at each other in shower rooms, or wherever, a crucial element of the male body—how it functions during sexual activity—would remain a mystery. Of course, I know what my own erection looks like, but so much stress is placed on the nature of erections that it's difficult not to wonder what the erections of other men look

like (and how mine looks in comparison).

One of the things that distinguishes the pornographic materials available in porn movies and arcades from what is available on local newsstands—and thus, implicitly, one of the things that accounts for the size of the hardcore porn market—is the pervasive presence of erections. In fact, to a considerable extent theater and arcade porn films are about erections. The standard anti-porn response to this is to see the porn film phallus as a combined battering ram/totem which encapsulates the male drive for power. And given the characterizations of the vain strutting men on the other ends of these frequently awesome shafts, such an interpretation seems almost inevitable. And yet, for me the pervasiveness of erect penises in porn has at least as much to do with simple curiosity. The darkness of porn houses and the privacy of arcade booths allow one to see erections close-up. The presence of women has its own power, but in this particular context one of the primary functions of the female presence is to serve as a sign—to others and to oneself—that looking at erections, even finding them sexy, does not mean that the viewer defines himself as a homosexual.

A second function of the pornographic experience involves the exact converse of a number of cultural attitudes which feminists have often seen as subtly detrimental to women. Most people now recognize that the constant attention to the "beauty" of the female body, which has been so pervasive in the arts and in commerce during recent centuries, may involve more than a respect and love for women—that it may be a tactic for keeping them more involved with how they look (and to a considerable extent, with pleasing men) than with what they do, or can learn to do. Further, the emphasis on a pristine ideal of beauty, as feminists have often pointed out, has frequently alienated women from their own bodies: real odors, secretions, processes have frequently been seen as contradictory of the Beauty of Womanhood. On the other hand, the same cultural history which has defined women as Beautiful has had, and to some extent continues to have, as its inevitable correlary, the Ugliness of men; women have been defined as beautiful precisely in contrast to men. Now, even if these definitions are seen as primarily

beneficial to men, in the sense that not having to be concerned with appearances allows them more energy and time for attaining their goals and maintaining their access to power, I sense that the definition also creates significant problems for men, and especially in the areas of love and sex, where physical attractiveness seems of the essence. In recent years we've seen a growing acceptance of the idea that men, too, can be beautiful. The burgeoning homosexual subculture seems evidence of this, as does the popularity of body building. And yet, just as the pressure to see women as "the weaker sex" continues to be felt in a culture where millions of women dramatize the intrinsic bankruptcy of that notion, many men—I'd guess most men—continue to feel insecure about the attractiveness of their bodies.

Perhaps the most obvious aspect of male sexual functioning which has been conditioned by negative assumptions about male attractiveness is ejaculation. Even among people who are comfortable with the idea that men can be beautiful, semen is often (if not usually) seen as disgusting. Is it an accident that many of the substances that our culture considers particularly revolting—raw egg, snot . . . —share with semen a general texture and look? Accidental or not, I've heard and read such comparisons all my life. I remember the shock and fear that followed my first orgasm. Without knowing it, I had been masturbating in the attic of my aunt's house where I had discovered a pile of girlie magazines. The unexpected orgasm was astonishing and thrilling, but at the end of it, I discovered, to my shock, that my shirt and the magazine were covered with a substance I hadn't known existed. I cleaned myself up (even at that early point I was clear that for my relatives—especially for my mother and my aunt—the mysterious substance would be seen as a form of dirtiness), and I spent the remainder of the day walking around with my arms and hands in odd configurations in front of my shirt in the hope of avoiding detection. From that time on, I was alert to the fact that every indulgence of my desire for sex would produce evidence the discovery of which, I was sure, could be humiliating.

Now I'm well aware that to accept a mucus-like substance that comes out of one's own

body is a different matter than accepting such a substance from another's body. I not only understand, but can empathize with the revulsion of many women to semen. Nevertheless, I suspect it creates the same problems for many men as the widespread squeamishness about menstruation has caused women. There are instances of course—in the midst of passion—where semen is temporarily accepted, even enjoyed by women, but these moments tend to be memorable exceptions. For the most part, even between people who love each other, the presence of semen is at best a necessary evil. Recently I mentioned this idea to a woman friend, who has had sex with many men and is proud of it, after she had indicated her contempt for men who were turned off by women's smells and secretions. "I think it depends on who you're with," she said. "If you care about the person, there's nothing disgusting about his semen." A few seconds later she added, "But who has to lie in it?" and laughed. Many women are concerned about the danger of "bleeding through" during menstruation, presumably because they feel, or fear that men feel, that menstrual secretions make them sexually undesirable; and dozens of products have been marketed to protect against such an occurrence. I feel a similar concern about semen, and must face a very special irony: the fact that it surfaces precisely at the moment of my most complete sexual abandon.

To me, the nature and function of pornography have always seemed understandable as a way for men to periodically deal with the cultural context which mitigates against their full acceptance of themselves as sexual beings. The fantasies men pay to experience in porn arcade booths and movie houses may ostensibly appear to be predicated on the brutalization of women. But from a male point of view, the desire is not to see women harmed, but to momentarily identify with men who—despite their personal unattractiveness by conventional cultural definitions, despite the unwieldy size of their erections, and despite their aggressiveness with their semen—are adored by the women they encounter sexually. Only in pornography will the fantasy woman demonstrate aggressive acceptance when a man ejaculates on her face. As embarrassingly abhorrent as it always strikes me, the hostility

toward women which usually seems to hover around the edges of conventional film pornography (in the frequently arrogant, presumptive manner the male characters exhibit, for example) and which is a primary subject matter in some films, seems to be a more aggressive way of dealing with the same issues. In these instances the fantasy is in punishing resistant women for their revulsion. Of course, the punishments—usually one form of rape or another—often end with the fantasy woman's discovery of an insatiable hunger for whatever has been done to her. This frequent turnabout appears to be nothing more than a reconfirmation of the stupid, brutal myth that women ask to be raped or enjoy being raped, but—as sadly ironic as this seems—it could also be seen as evidence that, in the final analysis, men don't mean harm to women, or don't wish to mean harm to women: their fantasy is the acceptance of their own biological nature by women.⁵ I've always assumed that porn and rape *are* part of the same general problem, though I've always felt it more likely that porn offers an outlet for some of the anger engendered by men's feelings of sensual/aesthetic inferiority, than that it serves as a fuel for further anger. But I'm only speaking from my own experience. I've rarely spoken frankly about such matters with men who use porn.

To try to understand the reasons for the huge business of making and marketing pornographic movies is not necessarily to justify the practice. One can only hope for increasingly definitive studies of how porn functions and what its effects are.⁶ But, however one describes the complex historical factors which have brought us to our present situation, the fact remains that in our culture men and women frequently feel alienated from their own bodies and from each other. Pornography is a function of this alienation, and I can't imagine it disappearing until we have come to see ourselves and each other differently. We don't choose the bodies we are born with; natural selection, or God—or whatever—takes care of that for us. And though we can't change the fact of our difference (and regardless of whether we choose to accept and enjoy this difference by being passionate about our own or the opposite sex, or both), surely we can learn to be mutually supportive about our bodies. My guess is that porn is a symp-

tom not so much of a sexual need, but of a need for self-acceptance and respect. If we can come to terms with that need, as it relates to both sexes, my guess is that porn will disappear.

NOTES

1. During my twenties and early thirties I would guess I went to porn films and/or arcades half a dozen times a year. In the past few years (I'm 40) I've gone less frequently; it probably works out to two or three times a year at most. I assume that some men frequent such places, while others go once or twice in a lifetime. I have no information on how often or seldom an "average" man pays to see pornography. I've not been conscious of specific changes in the situations presented in the films or the attitudes which are evident in them. I assume there has been some evolution in this regard, but my experiences have been too sporadic (and too surrounded by personal anxieties) for me to be able to formulate useful conclusions about this evolution.

2. In this sense, the porn narratives seem rather similar to those of Georges Méliès's films (the acting is roughly comparable, too!).

3. Once I've decided to go to a porn theater, I go immediately, without checking to see when the movies begin or end; as often as not, I arrive in the middle of a film. (This is true only when the theater in questions runs shows continuously; when a theater runs only one or two shows a day, I usually postpone a decision about going until just long enough before the beginning of the show so that the decision can be followed by immediate action.) With very rare exceptions, I've always left before a show is over; after one film has led up to and past its most stimulating motifs, I've waited only long enough to calm down and not leave the theater with a visible erection. I've never sat all the way through a double feature of porn films.

4. Recent "trash" and "punk" films—John Waters's *Multiple Maniacs*, *Pink Flamingos*, *Female Trouble*, *Desperate Living*; Beth and Scott B's *G-Man*, Robert Huot's *Dr. Faustus' Foot Fetish*, for example—have exploited a similar sense of aggressive amateurishness. In fact, since *G-Man* and *Dr. Faustus' Foot Fetish* are Super-8 films, they bring with them something of the feel of Super-8 porn loops.

5. The frequency of anal sex in porn films seems to confute this, at least if one assumes that anal sex is annoying and painful for most, or many, women. Yet, a decision not to press for fulfillment of such a desire because its fulfillment will cause pain doesn't necessarily eliminate the desire. I would guess that for many men the anal sex in porn films functions as a way of giving harmless vent to a desire they've decided not to pressure the real women in their lives about (harmless, that is, unless one assumes the women in the films feel they are being harmed, something I have no information about).

6. One recent attempt to assess porn's effects is Dolf Zillmann and Jennings Bryant's "Pornography, Sexual Callousness, and the Trivialization of Rape," *Journal of Communication* (Autumn 1982). Unfortunately, this study's central finding—"our investigation focused on sexual callousness toward women, demonstrating that massive exposure to standard pornographic materials devoid of coercion and aggression seemed to promote . . . callousness (in particular, the trivialization of rape . . .)"—is based on testing procedures and supported by assumptions which raise nagging questions. The study's conclusions are based on a test of the impact of pornography on students exposed in groups, in a college setting, to "massive," "intermediate," and "no" amounts of conventional, nonviolent pornographic film. But in real life, porn films are seen in a very particular environment, at least in most instances I know of: in a public/private context

outside the circle of one's friends and family, in places one is embarrassed about going into, and often in tiny toilet-like stalls. Wouldn't the meaning and impact of porn films be different given so different a context? Was there some reason for limiting those tested to students, and in particular to undergraduates "at a large eastern university"? Were these people users of pornography previously? What was their motivation for participating in such an experiment?

Bryant and Zillman face some of the possible implications of their experimental procedures for their results, but they assume that, at most, students might have guessed the researchers were attempting to legitimize pornography and therefore would have distorted answers in the direction of a general social attitude which, the researchers contend, is strongly supportive of pornography, and implicitly legitimizes it by giving it legal status. My sense of the general attitude toward porn is the opposite of theirs.

Certainly the legality of pornography doesn't prove that society approves of it: picking one's nose is legal, but hardly acceptable in society's eyes. My guess is that most people (including many or most of those who use porn and/or are supportive of its being available publicly to people of legal age) agree that porn is creepy and disgusting. And most people nowadays are well aware of the frequent conjecture that exposure to porn is an incentive to rape; even if we're dubious about the assumption of cause/effect in this instance, the contention creates concern. If the students tested were relatively new to porn, their massive exposure must have come as something of a shock, and if they were jolted—particularly by seeing such imagery in an institutional, unprivate context—might not some students have answered the rape questions posed later as a means of acceding to the widely held assumption that people who see porn films will be motivated by them to rape women?

BILL NICHOLS

The Voice of Documentary

It is worth insisting that the strategies and styles deployed in documentary, like those of narrative film, change; they have a history. And they have changed for much the same reasons: the dominant modes of expository discourse change; the arena of ideological contestation shifts. The comfortably accepted realism of one generation seems like artifice to the next. New strategies must constantly be fabricated to re-present "things as they are" and still others to contest this very representation.

In the history of documentary we can identify at least four major styles, each with distinctive formal and ideological qualities.¹ In this article I propose to examine the limitations and strengths of these strategies, with particular attention to one that is both the newest and in some ways the oldest of them all.²

The direct-address style of the Griersonian tradition (or, in its most excessive form, the March of Time's "voice of God") was the first thoroughly worked-out mode of documentary. As befitted a school whose purposes were overwhelmingly didactic, it employed a supposedly authoritative yet often presumptuous off-screen narration. In many cases this narration effectively dominated the visuals, though it could be, in films like *Night Mail* or *Listen to Britain*, poetic and evocative.

After World War II, the Griersonian mode fell into disfavor (for reasons I will come back to later) and it has little contemporary currency—except for television news, game and talk shows, ads and documentary specials.

Its successor, *cinéma vérité*, promised an increase in the "reality effect" with its directness, immediacy, and impression of capturing untampered events in the everyday lives of particular people. Films like *Chronicle of a Summer*, *Le Joli Mai*, *Lonely Boy*, *Back-Breaking Leaf*, *Primary* and *The Chair* built on the new technical possibilities offered by portable cameras and sound recorders which could produce synchronous dialogue under location conditions. In pure *cinéma vérité* films, the style seeks to become "transparent" in the same mode as the classical Hollywood style—capturing people in action, and letting the viewer come to conclusions about them unaided by any implicit or explicit commentary.

Sometimes mesmerizing, frequently perplexing, such films seldom offered the sense of history, context or perspective that viewers seek. And so in the past decade we have seen a third style which incorporates direct address (characters or narrator speaking directly to the viewer), usually in the form of the interview. In a host of political and feminist films, witness-participants step before the camera to tell their story. Sometimes profoundly